

**THE MEMOIRS OF AN
AMERICAN CITIZEN**

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OF
AN AMERICAN CITIZEN**

BY

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LOT," ETC.

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TO
WILL PAYNE

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"O Commander of the Faithful," said the other, "shall I tell thee what I have seen with my eyes or what I have only heard tell?"

"If thou hast seen aught worth telling," replied the Khalif, "let us hear it: for report is not like eye-witness."

"O Commander of the Faithful," said the other, "lend me thine ear and

thine heart."

"O Ibn Mensour," answered the Khalif, "behold I am listening to thee with mine ears, and looking at thee with mine eyes, and attending to thee with mine heart."

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CHAPTER I

THE LAKE FRONT IN CHICAGO

I sleep out—A companion—Hunting a job—Free lunch and a bad friend—

*Steele's store and what happened there—A positive young woman—
Number twelve*

It was a raw, blustering September night when I rounded up for the first time at the lake front in Chicago. There was just a strip of waste land, in those days, between the great avenue and the railroad tracks that skirted the lake. In 1876 there were no large hotels or skyscrapers fronting a tidy park; nothing but some wooden or brick houses, and, across the tracks, the waves lapped away at the railroad embankment. I was something more than twenty, old enough, at any rate, to have earned a better bed than a few feet of sand and sooty grass in a vacant lot. It was the first night I had ever slept out,—at least, because there was no place I had a right to go to. All that day I had been on the tramp from Indiana, and reached the city with only a few cents in my pockets.

I was not the only homeless wanderer by any means. Early in the evening a lot of bums began to drop in, slinking down the avenue or coming over from the city

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through the cross streets. It was early in the season; but to-night the east wind raked the park and shook gusts of rain from the low clouds, making it comfortable to keep moving. So we wandered up and down that sandy strip, footing it like dogs on the hunt for a hole, and eying each other gloomily when we passed.

Early in the evening a big wooden building at the north end was lighted up, and some of us gathered around the windows and hung there under the eaves watching the carriages drive up to the door to leave their freight. There was a concert in the hall, and after it began I crawled up into the arch of a window where I was out of the rain and could hear the music. Before the concert was over a watchman caught sight of me and snaked me to the ground. He was making a round of the building, stirring up the bums who had found any hole out of the reach of the wind. So we began once more that dreary, purposeless tramp to keep from freezing.

"Kind of chilly!" a young fellow called out to me.

"Chillier before morning, all right," I growled back, glad enough to hear a voice speaking to me as if it expected an answer.

"First night?" he inquired, coming up close to me in a friendly way. "'Tain't so bad—when it's warm and the wind don't blow."

We walked on together slowly, as though we were looking for something. When we came under the light of the lamps in the avenue we eyed each other. My tramp companion was a stout, honest-looking young

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fellow about my age. His loose-fitting black clothes and collarless shirt made me think that he too had come from the country recently.

"Been farming?" I ventured.

"Pine Lake, across there in Michigan—that's where I come from. Hostetter, Ed Hostetter, that's my name."

We faced about and headed toward the lake without any purpose. He told me his story while we dragged ourselves back and forth along the high board fence that guarded the railroad property. He had got tired of working on his father's farm for nothing and had struck out for the big city. Hostetter had a married aunt, so he told me, living somewhere in Chicago, and he had thought to stay with her until he could get a start on fortune's road. But she had moved from her old address, and his money had given out before he knew it. For the last week he had been wandering about the streets, hunting a job, and looking sharp for that aunt.

"We can't keep this up all night!" I observed when his story had run out.

"Last night I found an empty over there in the yards, but some of the railroad fellers got hold of me toward morning and made me jump high."

A couple of tramps were crouching low beside the fence just ahead of us. "Watch 'em!" my companion whispered.

Suddenly they burrowed down into the sand and disappeared. We could hear their steps on the other side of the fence; then a gruff voice. In a few moments back they came, burrowing up from under the fence.

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"That's what you get!" Ed grunted.

Well, in the end we had to make the best of it, and we camped right there, hugging the fence for protection against the east wind. We burrowed into the loose sand, piling it up on the open side until we were well covered. Now and then a train rushing past shook us awake with its heavy tread. Toward morning there were fewer trains, and though it began to mist pretty hard, and the water trickled into our hole, I managed to get some sleep.

At daylight we got up and shook ourselves, and then wandered miserably into the silent streets of the downtown district. Between us we had fifteen cents, and with that we got some coffee and a piece of bread at a little shanty stuck on the side of the river. A fat man with a greasy, pock-marked face served us, and I can see him now as he looked us over and winked to the policeman who was loafing in the joint.

After our coffee we began the hunt for an odd job, and Ed talked of his hopes of finding that aunt—Mrs. Pierson. We kept together because we were so lonesome, I suppose, and Ed was good company—jolly and happy-hearted. That night we slept on the back porch of an empty house 'way south, where the streets were broad, and there were little strips of green all about the houses. The owners of the large house we picked out must have been away for the summer. Toward morning we heard some one stirring around inside, opening and shutting doors, and we made up our minds there were thieves at work in the house.

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Ed stayed to watch, while I ran out to the avenue to get some help. It was a long time before I could find a policeman, and when we got back to the house there was Hostetter sitting on the curbstone hugging his belly. One of the thieves had come out of the house the back way, and when Ed tried to hold him had given him such a kick that Ed was glad to let him go. The officer I had brought evidently thought we were playing some game on him or weren't quite straight ourselves, and he tried to take us to the station. We gave him a lively chase for a couple of blocks; the last we saw of him he was shaking his fist at us and cussing loud enough to wake the dead.

That day was much like the one before, only worse. The weather was mean and drizzly. I earned a quarter lugging a valise across the city, and we ate that up at breakfast. At noon we turned into one of the flashy saloons on State Street. We hoped to be overlooked in the crowd before the bar while we helped ourselves to the crackers and salt fish. We were making out pretty well when a man who was standing near the bar and drinking nothing spied us and came over to the lunch table.

"Wet day," he observed sociably.

"That's about it," I replied cautiously, looking the man over.

He wore a long black coat, a dirty light-colored waistcoat, and a silk hat, underneath which little brown curls sprouted out. He fed himself delicately out of the common bowl, as if the free lunch didn't tempt his appetite.

"Seeing the town?" he asked next, looking pointedly at Ed's dirty shoes.

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"Some part of it, I reckon," Ed laughed.

"Looking for a job?"

"You bet we're looking!" Ed growled back. "Know where we can find it?"

Before long we were on easy terms with the stranger. He insisted on paying for beer all around, and on the strength of that Ed and I made another raid on a platter of beans. Dinner that night didn't look very promising.

"It seems to me I know of the very thing for you young fellers," our friend finally remarked, and we pricked up our ears.

He said he had a friend in one of the large stores on State Street, who had found fine places for some young men he had recommended. They were making big money now. Ed's eyes began to glisten. But suddenly another idea struck our good friend. He lowered his voice and drew us to one side. Would one of us like a fat job, where there wasn't much work except special times—a gay kind of place, where we could see something of life? Ed was pretty eager, but I rather suspected what he was after.

"I guess the other place is more what we want," I said.

"Ain't up to snuff just yet?" he giggled. "Wait a week or two, and you will be as quick as the next one."

As we made no reply, and I was moving toward the door, he remarked:—

"Sure, it's stopped raining! Let's be moving up the street, and see what my friend can do for you."

So we started up State Street with the man in the silk

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hat. At the door of a big dry-goods store, where we had tried unsuccessfully that morning to obtain work, he remarked:—

"We'll just look in here. I know a man in the gents' underwear department, and p'r'aps he can help you."

I didn't think it very likely, for I hadn't much faith in our smooth

acquaintance. But there was nothing better to do. So we all passed in through the heavy doors of Steele & Co.'s establishment. Even on that rainy afternoon the place was pretty well filled; mostly with women, who were bunched together at certain counters. We had some trouble in following our guide, who squirmed into the thick of every jam. I began to think that, having talked big to two green young fellows, he now wanted to give us the slip. But I determined, just to tease him, he shouldn't get out of our sight as easily as he thought to.

The "gents' underwear" department, as I happened to have observed in the morning, was on the State Street side, near the door which we had just entered. Nevertheless, our friend was leading us away from that part and seemed to prefer the most crowded aisles, where "ladies' goods" were displayed. At the glove counter there was a press of women who were trying to get near a heap of ninety-eight-cent gloves. Our guide was just ahead of us at this point, and near his elbow I noticed an old gentleman and a young lady. The latter, who was trying on a pair of gloves, kept asking the old gentleman a string of questions. He was smiling at her without taking the trouble to reply. The girl was pretty and

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nicely dressed, and I suppose I must have looked at her hard, for she suddenly glanced up at me and then turned her back and faced the counter. As she turned I noticed something white drop from her hand, and I pressed closer to her to pick it up. It was a little handkerchief. As I reached down I saw a thin hand stretch out around the young lady's waist and then give a little jerk. I had just straightened myself with the handkerchief in my fingers when I heard the young lady exclaim:—

"Father! My purse has gone!"

"Why, why!" the old man stammered. "Your purse has gone? Where could it have gone to?"

Just then some one grabbed my arm, and a voice said in my ear:—

"Not so slick as that, young feller!"

A man who looked like an official of the store had hold of me.

"Don't make any fuss, and hand over that lady's purse," he added in a low voice.

"I haven't got her purse. I was just going to give her this handkerchief, which I saw her drop," I protested, holding up the silly thing I had picked from the floor.

"That's all right," the man said with a grin. "And now hand over the purse, too."

He began to feel my pockets, and, of course, I resented his familiarity, and, like a country jake, kicked up a muss then and there. A crowd began to collect. The floor-manager rushed up at this point, and between them I was hustled across the store and into one of the private offices. The first thing I heard when I got there

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was the old gentleman just behind me, stuttering, too much excited to talk plain.

"Yes, yes, my daughter's purse! She just lost it!"

"That's all right," I said. "And I saw the fellow who took it...."

"I saw this man take it," I heard the girl say to the manager.

"Yes, yes, my daughter saw the thief take her purse," the old man put in excitedly.

"I was watching him all the time," said the man who had laid hold of me first. "He came in at the State Street entrance a few minutes ago with a green one and an old sneak. I didn't think he had the time to pass the stuff over."

I was cool now, and laughed as the manager and the detective

went through my pockets carefully.

"The old one's got the stuff fast enough," the detective remarked disgustedly. "Shall we have this one locked up, Mr. Marble?"

"You'll do it at your risk!" I put in loudly.

"Where's the young woman?" the manager demanded.

"It happened just while my daughter was buying a pair of gloves," the old man began to chatter. "You were asking me, my love...."

The young woman looked a little confused, I thought, and not so sure of herself. But she answered the manager's questions by saying promptly:—

"He must have taken it!"

"You saw him?" the detective questioned.

"Yes—I must have seen him—I saw him, of course!"

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"I don't believe you could have seen me, ma'am," I said with a grin, "for you had just turned your back on me."

"How did you know that?" she asked triumphantly.

"I know it because when I first began to look at you, you didn't like it, and so you turned your back on me to show it."

"You know too much, young man," the manager remarked. "You'll prosecute him?" he added, turning to the old man.

"Prosecute? Why, yes, of course," he stammered; "though, if he hasn't the purse—"

"Come on, m'boy," the detective said to me. "You and I'll take a stroll down the street and find a good night's lodging for you."

That was before the day of patrol wagons. So the detective locked his right arm securely in my left, and in this intimate fashion we walked through the streets to the police station.

When we reached that foul-smelling pen we were kept waiting by a large "order" that had just been rounded up from a gambling-house in the neighborhood. There were about twenty men and women in this flock. They were filing, one by one, before the desk-sergeant. I had never heard such a family gathering of names. They were all Smiths, Browns, and Joneses, and they all lived a good way from town, out in the fifty-hundreds, where there are many vacant lots. At the end of the file there was a little unshaven Jew, who seemed very mad about it all. He was the only one who had any money; he

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gave up a fat roll of bills that took the officer some time to count.

"I know who did this!" the Jew sputtered at the man behind the desk. "And I can make it hot for some of youse, all right."

"That's good," the sergeant replied pleasantly. "Another time you'll have the sense to know when you are well off."

I thought this was fatherly advice addressed to the Jew for his moral health. I congratulated myself that I had fallen into clean hands. So when my turn came, I said to the desk-sergeant confidentially:—

"I am quite innocent!"

"Is that so, m'son?" he remarked pleasantly.

"They haven't any right to arrest me. I was—"

"Of course, of course! Keep all that for his Honor to-morrow morning. What's your name, m'son?"

"E.V. Harrington," I replied quite innocently.

"And where do you hail from?"

"Jasonville, Indiana."

It did not occur to me then that, guilty or innocent, it made no difference after I had given my real name and home. Thanks to the enterprise of metropolitan journalism, the folks in Jasonville, Indiana, would be reading at their breakfast to-morrow morning all about how Van Harrington had been taken up as a thief.

"Here!" the fat sergeant called out to one of the officers, after I had handed over to his care the few odds and ends that I still had about me; "show the gent from Indiany to number twelve."

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CHAPTER II

THE HARRISON STREET POLICE COURT

A night in jail—A rapid-fire judge—The young lady is not so positive—The psychology of justice—What's the matter with Jasonville?—I tell my story to his Honor

Feeling that I had come to the end of things in Chicago mighty quick.

There was a greasy bench at one end of number twelve, where I sat myself down, feeling that I had come to the end of things in Chicago mighty quick. A measly gas-jet above the door showed what a stinking hole I had got myself into. I could hear the gambling party across the way, laughing and talking, taking their lot rather easily. Pretty soon a man was put into the cell next mine. He kept groaning about his head. "My head!"

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he would say, "oh, my head! My head! oh, my head!" until I

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